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Possible Coup in Portugal

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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

NIO 304-75

Office of the Director

25 January 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Henry A. Kissinger  
Assistant to the President  
(National Security Affairs)

SUBJECT : Intelligence Alert Memorandum: Possible  
Coups in Portugal

1. We have received a number of signs that a potentially violent contest for power is shaping up next week in Lisbon.

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[REDACTED] a coup is planned either for 28 or 29 January. Although the plot reportedly is being coordinated with the Portuguese Communist Party, the Party 25X6A intends to remain in the background and action will be in the hands of the leftist members of the Armed Forces Movement. The plan has allegedly been [REDACTED] and involves the arrest of key moderates in the Armed Forces Movement. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The ability of the intended victims to prevent a successful coup is one of the major uncertainties.

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3. The recent wrangle over the labor law has aggravated deep divisions between moderate and leftist elements within the Armed Forces Movement. Although the Communists won that battle, there is considerable evidence that the cost was high and that the moderates expected the AFM to give them the next victory. It is conceivable that the Communists have already concluded that the victory was a pyrrhic one, that their fortunes have peaked, and that they had best move decisively now to prevent erosion of their position and block a reaction.

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4. The Lisbon press announced today that the Communists, in coordination with other leftist groups, are planning street demonstrations on January 31 in support of the Movement's fight to combat big business. The Socialist Party had previously scheduled a rally on the same day and a clash between these two groups which could broaden into a more serious conflict is a live possibility. We have one report that the Communists planned their demonstration to prevent or offset the Socialists from showing the latter's greater popularity. It is also possible, however, that the Communist plan is to provide a smokescreen for the intended coup described above.

5. Given the circumstances, the chances for a preemptive coup from the right or by the intended victims have also increased. We have received several reports in recent months that circles connected with Spínola were planning such an action but their lack of support within the Armed Forces Movement made their chances of success bleak. We are alert to the prospect that rightists are circulating stories of leftist coup attempts which they will use as a pretext to take action themselves.

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6. We take this report seriously enough to alert you now, though we cannot at the moment confirm it. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Meanwhile, we are preparing a more comprehensive assessment on Portugal, which will address this and other aspects, which we will forward early next week. In the interim, any significant spot reporting will be forwarded directly.

7. Judgments in this paper have been coordinated with analysts in State, DIA and NSA. [REDACTED]

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W. E. Colby  
Director

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